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# Congress looks at allegations of contra criminal activity

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By Alfonso Chardy
*Inquirer Washington Bureau*

WASHINGTON — Staff members of at least four congressional committees are inquiring into allegations of criminal activity by Nicaraguan rebels, congressional sources familiar with the probes said yesterday.

Some of the legislators behind the inquiries are seeking to persuade House and Senate leaders to establish a select committee, similar to th Watergate panel, to investigate Pres dent Reagan's aid program to th rebels, or contras. But so far, the sources said, there is no solid evidence to warrant a special panel.

"As things stand now, everything is very disparate, diffuse and murky," said a senior congressional aide involved in the inquiries. "At this point, I am not prepared to recommend the formation of a special panel. We need to find out more evidence. What there is now is not sufficient."

An administration official involved with the contra program said the congressional inquiries will "go nowhere" and are mainly an effort to "discredit" the rebels and Reagan's Nicaragua policy.

Nevertheless, he conceded that the allegations have stalled White House efforts to win congressional approval for Reagan's $100 million contra-aid request.

The inquiries are being conducted by Democratic staff members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the House Select Committee on Intelligence, the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on Western Hemisphere affairs and the House Judiciary subcommittee on crime. The sources said that:

- Staffers working for Sen. John F. Kerry (D., Mass.), a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, are focusing on allegations of gunrunning, drug smuggling and White House involvement with the contras despite a congressional ban on involvement with the rebels. The full committee will hold a hearing on the allegations in June.
- Western Hemisphere Affairs subcommittee aides, in coordination with the General Accounting Office, are looking into irregularities in the handling of a $27 million "humanitarian" aid program. A GAO report released Thursday said that $13.3 million of the $21.1 million disbursed to the rebels so far cannot be fully accounted for.
- The crime subcommittee is reviewing drug-running allegations related to a 1983 case, in which two alleged members of a contra faction were convicted in San Francisco of cocaine smuggling. U.S. Attorney Joseph Russoniello sealed the records of the case, citing allegations of a national security nature, and reportedly returned money that had been seized as evidence to one of the defendants.
- The Intelligence Committee is checking all allegations to verify if there is evidence of violations of agreements with the intelligence community on contra aid.

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Administration officials say that Marine Lt. Col. Oliver North, a National Security Council staff member and likely target of the investigators, has been advised by White House counsel to retain an attorney.

North was assigned by the White House in 1984 to serve as chief liaison with the contras after Congress suspended covert aid. Recent press disclosures have suggested that North may have violated the congressional ban on administration involvement with the contras by allegedly helping them raise private aid.

North has refused comment. But a senior administration official speaking for him said North "has not been involved in illegal activities."

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